
**HISTORIC PRESERVATION REVIEW BOARD
STAFF REPORT AND RECOMMENDATION**

Landmark/District:	Mount Pleasant Historic District	(x) Agenda
Address:	3304 19th Street NW	
Meeting Date:	March 23, 2017	(x) New construction/ addition
Case Number:	17-237	
Staff Reviewer:	Tim Dennée	(x) Permit

The applicant, Emily Bacher (of R. Michael Cross Design Group), agent and architect for the property owner, Greg Faust, requests review of a permit application to demolish most of a single-story garage in order to replace it with a two-story “carriage house” to accommodate an accessory apartment.

The property is zoned “RF-1,” which means that two dwelling units total are permitted on the lot, either both within the primary structure, or one in the house and one in an accessory structure.

Demolition

Three one-story brick garages were erected contemporaneously with the three-unit 1917 row that consists of 3300, 3302 and 3304 19th Street. The garage at 3300 was largely demolished years ago, although portions of its walls remain. The garage behind 3302 was largely reconstructed, as it now largely of concrete block, supporting a roof of open rafters and corrugated steel. This project would result in the demolition of everything but the remnants of the party walls.

The Board has allowed even some intact, but nondescript, one-story 1910s and 1920s garages to be demolished for contributing little to the character of the historic district. This structure has less character and historic integrity than most and appears to need reconstruction if it were to be retained. It should be considered a noncontributing structure, subject to raze or heavy alteration.

New construction

In the location of the present garage, the applicant proposes to construct a two-story, nearly flat-roofed building with a brick-veneer façade facing the alley, with the rest of the walls to be clad in fiber-cement board.

There are relatively few two-story accessory buildings in Mount Pleasant. The historic district was mostly developed after horses were no longer a principal means of transport. Most early residents lacked private means of transport, beyond their own legs, and would have used the streetcars. Many single-story garages were erected from the 1910s and 1920s, as automobiles became common and needed no haylofts.

There are exceptions to this pattern, however. A number of the grander detached houses on the

north side of the 1800 block of Park Road have two-story garages, as do a couple other large buildings in that vicinity. Those houses and garages differ in character from those to be found in the context into which the proposed structure would be introduced. Indeed, the subject alley—serving the 3300 block of 19th Street, the 1900 and 2000 blocks of Park Road, and the 1800 block of Ingleside Drive—contains almost exclusively one-story garages.

But there is some historic precedent for two-story garages behind Mount Pleasant rowhouses, namely the south side of the 1800 block of Lamont Street. They were presumably built that way because the land falls off north to south, steep enough that the rear yards would extend over top single-story garages. And because the back yards are fairly shallow, the garages were built with slab roofs to serve as decks, continuations of the yards. Of course, that meant that these structures needed railings or fences atop them, which adds to their apparent height. They face houses across the alley on Kilbourne Place that are situated at lower elevations and have only average-depth rear yards.



A Google Streetview photo of garages on the south side of the 1800 block of Lamont Street.

On the subject alley, there are two recent two-story accessory buildings, standing behind neighboring properties at 3308 and 3310 19th Street. The concepts for these were approved by the Board in 2006 and 2007. These are akin to the Lamont Street garages in that the rationale for approval was that the topography at this location creates a substantial grade change between the homes on 19th Street and those across the alley on Park Road. Fitting the houses to that topography is responsible for unusually deep lots on both sides of the alley, separating the houses further than those on Lamont and Kilbourne. This creates a condition where the taller garages are still low relative to the houses they serve, and stand so far from the still-lower homes across the alley that they have little visual impact. A line drawn between the roofs of the houses on 19th and those downhill on Park would fly over the new garages, meaning that the garages never overshadow the latter.



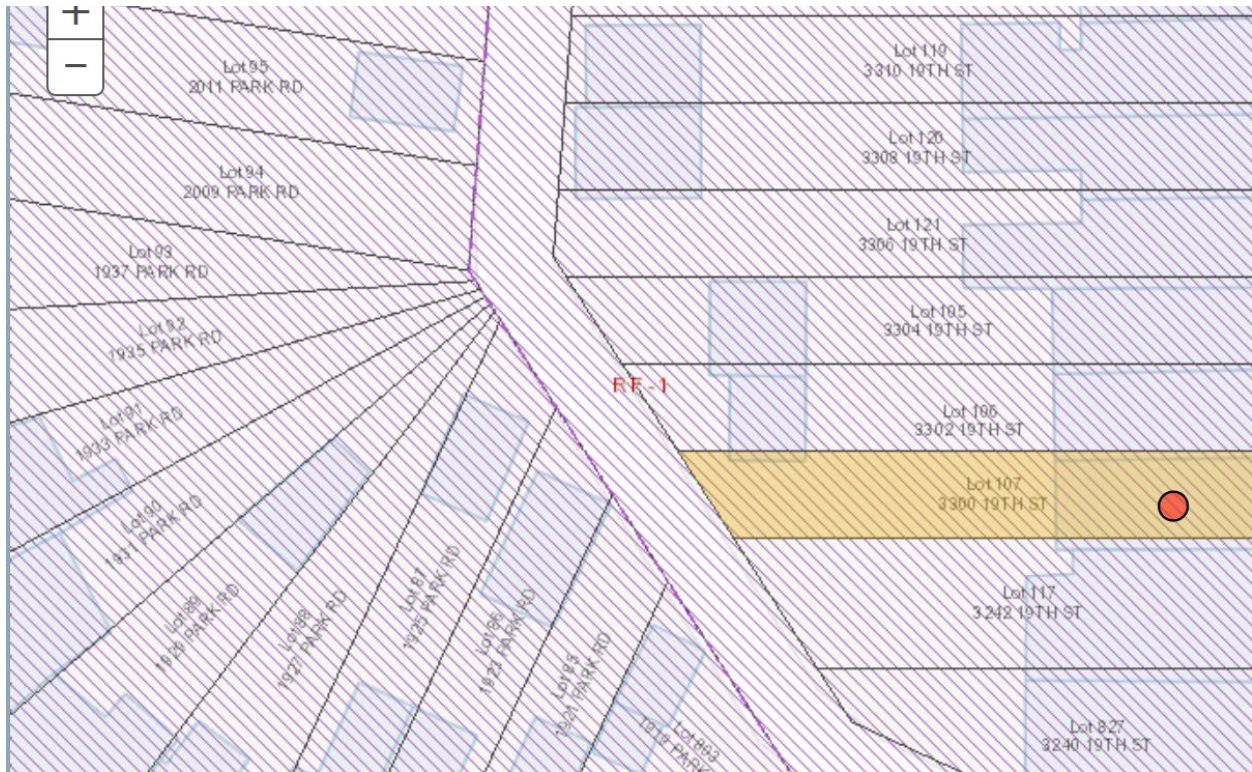
A Google Streetview photograph of the decade-old garages behind 3308 and 3310 19th Street.

The situation here is similar to that on Lamont/Kilbourne, except that these deeper rear yards separate the houses more on either side of the alley, and the placement of the garages at the very rear of the lots separates *them* from the elevated rear yards of the 19th Street houses. This latter separation means that the historic pattern of house-yard-garage is maintained more consistently, and it does not induce the kind of garage-top decks that make the Lamont-Street properties somewhat unsightly, because one cannot walk directly from the yards to the garage roofs. And this is why the present proposal should be adjusted.

HPO has concluded that the present garage retains little historic value and will have even less historic character if altered. It is uncertain even whether the remnants of the party walls will be useful to support an expanded building. The fact that this garage is set away from the alley is a historical accident. Because the garages behind 3300-3304 19th were constructed as a piece using party walls, they paralleled the rears of the houses, meaning that they increasingly set back from the angled alley as they stretched northward. But the south corner of the 3300 garage was right on the alley, and that is the prevailing pattern for the garages along this section of it. With one of the three garages already gone and this one to be demolished, there is no compelling reason to honor its spot.¹

There are two advantages of shifting the entire building nearer the alley. First, it would reinforce an alley face consistent with the two-story garages, and consistent with the other one-story garages, which are all nearer the alley. Second, it would also reinforce the pattern on this block of a reasonably deep rear yard between house and accessory building. The alley running obliquely to 19th Street truncates the lots means that this yard is already constrained. The creation of a two-story building on the same spot, but with a deeper footprint would have a very different impact on the feeling within the yards of the subject property and the adjacent ones. A new “carriage house” apartment should be pushed as far rearward as possible to compensate.

¹ The new structure would not follow the front or rear line of the original garages.



Above: A DC Property Quest map detail depicting the relationship to this alley of its existing accessory structures.

Below: A neighbor's photograph, taken from 3306 19th Street, which suggests the relatively low impact of two-story garages on this alley, when placed near the alley's edge. The roof of the nearer, one-story garage behind 3304 can be seen at left, indicated by the arrow.



The design of the building should be revised as well. The exterior material should be consistent throughout and appropriate to such a structure. A brick façade is not convincing if the sides are obviously of frame. True stucco is a material has been approved in the past for both one- and two-story garages.

The semi-circular-arched openings are ahistoric, as they are not characteristic of even the old two-story garages in the district. (And they are depicted without even the suggestion of structural brick arches.) The idea of a vehicle door is compatible with an alley building, but it should be within a rectilinear opening.

Skylights are proposed, and these should be installed so as to be invisible from the alley. The only exterior mechanical depicted appears to be a unit for a mini split air-conditioning system, located behind the building in the house's rear yard.

Recommendation

HPO recommends that the Board approve a concept for a two-story "carriage house" building, with the following conditions:

- 1) the building's south corner be located within two feet of the alley;*
- 2) the building's skin be consistent all around, and probably of stucco;*
- 3) the building's openings be rectilinear; and*
- 4) the skylights, mechanical equipment, and any utility meters be situated so as not to be visible from the alley.*